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Borat the Trickster: Folklore and the Media, Folklore in the Media

Natalie Kononenko and Svitlana Kukharenko

Which child has not wished that fairy tales might come true? And who among us has not wanted to be as mighty, as fearless, and as wise as the hero of one of these tales? Who has not wanted to receive the aid of magical helpers, triumph over powerful adversaries, and then live happily ever after? But how many adults would really want to come face to face with such a personage? It is always much safer and funnier to watch from afar, preferably from the comfort of a seat in a movie theater, as someone else encounters a character of mythic stature, one unconstrained by social norms. And many people had the opportunity to a watch such a hero in action when *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* was released in 2006. This low-budget movie became so popular worldwide that it grossed $250 million and received a four-star rating. Yet reaction to the film has been filled with contradictions. Some people have thoroughly enjoyed the film, laughed hysterically, bought Borat T-shirts, and emulated Borat's mannerisms: his gestures, his English pronunciation, his turns of phrase. Other people have left the theater in disgust, wondering why they wasted their time and money on something that they typically describe as "dirty," "primitive," "absurd," or "obscene."

What is it about this film that elicits such strong and diverse reactions? Surely it is the main character, Borat Sagdiyev, played by the British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen. While some people may think that Borat is something original, those who are fond of folk narratives would disagree, for they easily detect mythical traits in Borat. Borat is only the most recent incarnation of an archetypical figure: the trickster who can be found in tales and myths around the world.

As folklorists discovered almost two centuries ago, certain plots and characters are international, if not universal. *Types of International Folktales* is an index that codifies plots and helps researchers locate these plots in tales from around the world.[1] A motif index similarly helps trace objects and actors.[2] The trickster is one type of actor. In European folklore, including Russian and other Slavic tales, there are two types of tricksters. One is typically found in animal tales and is personified by Lisichka Sestrichka (Sister Fox). This creature tricks other animals, and sometimes humans, in a variety of ways. Often the fox tricks animals into believing that they have beautiful singing voices, using this ruse either to steal the animal's food or to capture the animal itself. Sometimes she convinces other animals that their body parts can serve as tools, as when she tells

1. Hans-Jorg Uther, *Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (Helsinki, 2004).

2. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; a Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols. (Bloomington, 1955–58).

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the wolf to immerse his tail into a hole cut in the ice and use it to catch fish. As the hole freezes over, the wolf is trapped. Even crueler is the trick where the fox convinces the hungry wolf that he can snack on his own intestines, leading him to disembowel himself.[3] These are just a few of the many, many "tricks" found in animal tales. What characterizes animal tale trickery is that it deals with the most basic of things: the body and its functions, the physical world and its rules. A typical "trick" revolves around a creature's failure to understand a law of nature; the trickster leads the victim into this state of misunderstanding, undermining the victim's ability to make fundamental distinctions. Characters may fail to comprehend basic things about the body, such as whether it can serve as food and how much heat and cold it can tolerate. Or they may fail to distinguish living beings from inanimate objects. The animal trickster misleads at the most basic level, and the tricks are primitive and often centered on the body and bodily functions.

The other type of trickster appears in what have variously been called tales of everyday life (*bytovye skazki*) and tales of clever fools.[4] Well known from Aleksandr Pushkin's poetic adaptation of a folktale entitled "Skazka o Pope i Rabotnike ego Balde," this trickster is human (and usually male). Although the trickster may appear foolish or naive, he gets the best of even the most clever of men. In tales, this is frequently the village priest, though there are stories where the trickster outwits greedy merchants and even the devil himself. The trickster triumphs by his seeming stupidity. In a number of stories the priest hires the trickster hero, assuming that he will be able to take advantage of the trickster's naiveté and use him as a hired hand while avoiding paying for his services. Initially, the trickster appears to be a compliant worker, willing to follow the priest's every directive. The problem is that he "misunderstands" everything that he is told. When the priest tells him to bring home the brown cows, the trickster corrals several bears instead, presumably not knowing the difference. When told to herd grey sheep, he drives a pack of grey wolves into the farmstead. In some versions he even kills the priest's children. When the priest tries to flee this enormously destructive laborer, the trickster empties the priest's luggage and crawls in himself, "assuming" that the priest would surely want to take him along. In this group of trickster tales, the hero is often an instrument of social justice, punishing the greedy and exacting revenge for the wrongs perpetrated upon the lowly and the meek. Whether he is truly stupid, accomplishing what he does by accident, or remarkably clever, exacting justice in a way that leaves him immune to punishment, is always open to question.

Borat combines qualities of both the animal trickster and the clever fool. Preoccupied with bodily functions like the animal trickster, he is

3. Jack Haney, *The Complete Russian Folktale,* vol. 2, *Russian Animal Tales* (Armonk, N.Y., 1999). For various examples of trickery, see "Sister Fox and the Wolf," 3–6; "The Tale of the Grey Wolf," 7–10; "Cousin Fox and the Wolf," 58–62; "Beasts in the Pit," 14–15; "The Pig Set Off for the Games," 18–20; and "The Fox and the Crow," 49.

4. Jack Haney, *The Complete Russian Folktale,* vol. 7, *Russian Tales of Clever Fools* (Armonk, N.Y., 2006). For examples of the tricks listed here, see 3–47, 149–54.

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also oblivious to social norms and misunderstands the directives of those in authority, like the clever fool. Also like the clever fool, he exposes the flaws and inconsistencies of the American system, which he is ostensibly studying and presenting to his countrymen as a model worthy of emulation. Although most European traditions separate the animal trickster from the human clever fool, there are traditions where one person exhibits both trickster types, as in Borat. This combination can be found in the myths of a number of Native American peoples. Applying the insights gained from the extensive literature on the North American trickster can help us understand the character of Borat Sagdiyev and the reactions that Baron Cohen's film elicits.

This is not to suggest that Baron Cohen plagiarized North American myth. On the contrary, his sources could have been anything from North American myth, to European folktale, to modern film and television—for tricksters abound in all these spheres. Wiley Coyote, who is repeatedly tricked by Road Runner, is an older example of a media trickster, while the Itchy and Scratchy meta-cartoons on the *Simpsons* are more modern (and more violent) trickster stories. And it should be noted that Homer Simpson himself often plays the clever fool. In fact, if one is to believe Carl Jung, Baron Cohen could have drawn Borat out of his own unconscious, spontaneously replicating a mythic archetype.[5]

Many contemporary artists draw on traditional material, and including various elements of oral traditions or appropriate traditional mythology in modern works is quite a popular practice. Whether intentionally created as a mythic figure, Borat is an excellent contemporary example of the trickster typical of, but not restricted to, North American mythology. The derogatory epithets applied to Borat are in keeping with the psychological portrait of a trickster character, and the ambivalent reactions that he elicits are the trickster's hallmark. Classic stories of the trickster are far from admirable. According to Lewis Hyde, they are "radically anti-idealist; they are made in and for a world of imperfection."[6] Such stories may indeed sound obscene to an unprepared outsider listening to them for the first time. And any number of trickster descriptives fit Borat. The real difference between our modern character and the traditional trickster is that the latter operates in the world of myth. He functions in a time outside time, among characters who cross the boundaries between human, animal, and spirit. Baron Cohen, in trickster guise, went out into the real world among real people. Borat intruded into the lives of unsuspecting Americans (who knows how many; we see only those included in the movie) many of whom were not aware of the reason they were being filmed. These people were tricked into comedic situations for the entertainment of theatergoers.

Even the structure of Baron Cohen's film resembles folklore, and we find the three main elements of a classic tale: separation, initiation, and

5. Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,* trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, 1969).

6. Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York, 1998), 91.

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return, typically accompanied by marriage. Thus, the Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev and his producer Azamat Bagatov leave Kazakhstan for the United States to accomplish an "honorable mission": to make a documentary about the American way of life in order to enlighten their countrymen. Upon their arrival, however, Borat becomes obsessed with the idea of finding Pamela Anderson from the television program *Baywatch* and rushes to Los Angeles to marry her, abandoning all his duties. After an unsuccessful attempt to abduct her, Borat is disillusioned and he gains insight: he discovers that true beauty is the beauty of the spirit. He then marries a kind and sincere woman, the African-American prostitute Luenell, and returns to his home country. Along the way, the various events that occur follow mythical patterns that can be recognized by any trained folklorist. They allude to the trickster cycle and follow the rules of composition of narratives in that cycle. To trace those patterns we first turn to the traditional trickster figure.

The trickster who is both animalistic and human, the type of character found in North American narrative, is usually a character of myth rather than folktale. Myths center on the cosmos, super-human actors, and deities. Myths are etiological: they explain fundamental issues such as how life originated, how people were created, and so on, and they are connected with the religious beliefs of the culture in which they function. In North American mythology, the trickster is usually an animal-human figure whose behavior reflects and plays with the social relations of human society, thus helping people understand what those relations should be. While confirming cultural norms, he allows people to question the social order. In North American mythology, his name and incarnation differ from tribe to tribe: he is Raven on the North Pacific coast; Mink or Blue Jay in the south, on the plateau, and in the plains; Coyote in California; Rabbit in the southeast; Manabozho or Wiskajak in the central woodlands; Flint and Sapling among the Iroquois; or Glooscap among the northeast Algonquins.[7] His characteristics, however, tend to be stable: he is an "utter fool, a breaker of the most holy taboos, a destroyer of the most sacred objects"; he is also "cruel, cynical and unfeeling."[8] One's first impression of him is quite negative: the trickster is a marginal, liminal figure; he disregards social conventions; he knows no ethical values: he lies, steals, commits antisocial acts. He is selfish and thinks only about gratifying his own impulses and satisfying his appetites. His acts are brutal, savage, and senseless, and they bring endless trouble and grief to both animals and humans.

The trickster does not play the role of the devil in the myths, however. In fact, a strict division into benevolent God and malevolent devil is more characteristic of the Christian tradition. Instead, the traditional trickster is perceived as an ambivalent creature: he is "at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator. . . . He knows neither good nor evil

7. Ibid., 68.

8. Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (London, 1956), 133; Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man* (New York, 1953), 313.

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yet he is responsible for both . . . he embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined."[9] The trickster subverts meanings existing in a culture, and he sometimes acts as a benefactor. Thus, "he can rob a woman of her children, or make the barren wife fertile. He can turn friendship into hatred . . . , make the innocent seem guilty and the ugly beautiful."[10] It is hard to capture the spirit of a traditional trickster precisely because his whole character is built on contradictions, and his behavior is centered on confusing any distinction between clean and dirty, stupid and clever, true and false, natural and unnatural, real and illusory, right and wrong, sacred and profane, male and female, young and old, living and dead.[11] Of all those opposites, though, a trickster is especially prone to disturbing the "clean and dirty" opposition, which has led scholars to believe that "the telling of trickster tales [was] a sort of narrative dirt-ritual" in traditional cultures.[12]

Borat exemplifies how opposites can be confused and boundaries violated. He reverses the ethical and aesthetic conventions of American everyday life and profanes sacred things: he washes his face in a toilet and his underpants in a river; he wears the same dirty, smelly suit throughout the film. He desecrates the American anthem and laughs at the Pentecostal church's way of praising God. He offends people or makes them embarrass themselves. For example, he refers to a feminist as a "pussy cat" and calls her "an old man." He makes a denigrating comment about the dinner party hostess while complimenting other women. He displays pictures of a man from his "native village" wearing a sex toy on his amputated arm. He makes fools of prominent politicians, fraternity boys, and large audiences such as rodeo spectators. Since all social conventions and moral rules are alien to the trickster, his behavior is shocking from a common sense point of view. And Borat's behavior, indeed, shocks ordinary Americans who expect their fellows to follow certain rules and to keep within certain behavior patterns in their everyday lives. Impulsive and selfish, the trickster enthusiastically disrupts such patterns; he creates chaos; his doings "invert and disorder the normal pattern of life."[13] Karl Kerenyi suggests that the trickster's function "in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology . . . [was] to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted."[14] As if the urban jungles of contemporary America were not chaotic enough, Borat violates what limitations there are, angering those who cross his path.

How does Borat violate boundaries? First, he literally crosses the border into the "US and A" and then he travels across the country. The whole movie is a chain of unrelated "road" episodes where things happen to

9. Radin, *Trickster,* ix, 10.
10. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 118.
11. Ibid., 74.
12. Ibid., 267.
13. Ibid., 186.
14. Karl Kerenyi, "Commentary," in Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man* (New York, 1953), 185.

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Borat (or, more often, to others). The motif of wandering is typical for the traditional trickster, and Borat, like a traditional trickster, is always on the road, for "to be in a particular town or city is to be situated; to be on the road is to be between situations."[15] He travels in a used ice-cream truck from Washington, D.C., to California, making only short stops. As a traveler, Borat is a transitional, liminal character; he is in-between two different societies, cultures, and destination points. And, like any trickster, he is a powerful example of the ability to survive on a journey, no matter what.

As a mythical trickster wanders, he encounters beings and situations that he does not understand and mistakes one thing for another. Borat is incompetent because he is an outsider, the product of another society, who does not understand how he should behave in America. As Shawna Cunningham points out, "in traditional myths, the Trickster's interaction with various societies . . . begins primarily on an 'intruder level.' "[16] Borat invades American society, disrupting its rules and disregarding its social conventions. He confuses words (*retired/retarded*) and people. His manners cause outrage among people everywhere. Borat reverses the ethical and aesthetic conventions of American everyday life and profanes sacred things. But it is not just Borat's behavior that makes him "Other." Whether consciously or not, Baron Cohen selected a figure that epitomizes invasion, intrusion, and "Otherness" in today's America: Borat's home country, Kazakhstan, is a Muslim nation rich in oil.

Traditional North American myths present the trickster as "a hero who . . . is always hungry . . . who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him and who is highly sexed."[17] The trickster's sexuality seems to dominate all other instincts. It is so exaggerated and uninhibited that the trickster easily breaks the incest taboo, raping or marrying his own daughter or mother-in-law.[18] "Constantly gustatory, sexual, and scatological," Borat is preoccupied with bodily functions and demonstrates his hypersexuality in various ways.[19] For example, he defecates in a flowerbed and brings a bag of his own feces to a dinner party. He kisses his "sister" on the lips and claims to have had sex with his mother-in-law, talks endlessly about the *vazhyn* (vagina), and masturbates in public while looking at manikins in a store window. Explicit female and male nudity permeates the movie, with its apogee being a nude wrestling scene with homoerotic overtones between Borat and Azamat.

Hyde notes that the traditional trickster invents language, not only literally, in the form of speech, inner language, or hieroglyphs, but also in the form of "lively talk where there has been silence, or where speech

15. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 39.

16. Shawna Marie Cunningham, "The Trickster in Transition: Tomson Highway's Theatrical Adaptation of the Traditional Trickster Figure" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1995), 52.

17. Radin, *Trickster,* 155.

18. Mac Linscott Ricketts, "North American Tricksters," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), 15:49.

19. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 63.

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has been prohibited."[20] Borat, indeed, uses a made-up language that is ostensibly Kazakh, but when he does not speak his funny, yet comprehensible, English, he actually uses a mixture of Hebrew, Polish, and Russian. Meanwhile, all writing on the screen is either a senseless combination of Cyrillic letters or grammatically incorrect Russian. And Borat, indeed, says, or provokes others to say, things that are not publicly articulated in American society.

Creative lying and opportunism are traits of a trickster that have led the trickster to be described as a "creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool."[21] The movie itself is replete with creative lies. Borat is said to be from Kazakhstan, yet the village that is purported to be his home is in Romania. Furthermore, the villagers were not told the purpose of the filming and did not suspect that they would be negatively portrayed. According to the film, Borat works for a television station, yet he has no idea how to use a microphone in a studio. When he was doing the actual filming and interviewing Americans, Borat introduced himself to the Americans he interviewed sometimes as a Kazakh television reporter, sometimes as one from Belarus, but, with rare exceptions, none of his interviewees knew what they were being dragged—or tricked—into doing and saying.[22] Characteristically, the "trickster feels no anxiety when he deceives," and Baron Cohen seems to have no concern about deliberately hoodwinking the people with whom he interacts or about inviting the movie audience to become voyeurs, to have fun at others' expense.[23] Like a traditional trickster, Borat is an opportunist: he wants to get a reaction from the people he talks to; he provokes, misleads, and "keeps a sharp eye out for naturally occurring opportunities and creates them ad hoc when they do not occur by themselves."[24]

Not only does a trickster play tricks on others; he may also be tricked himself. A common plot in the mythology of tricksters involves the trickster getting something valuable and being instructed to use it only under specific conditions. If the trickster violates these conditions, he will suffer as a result.[25] Borat is given the opportunity to work for three weeks in America "for the benefit of his country," but he neglects his duties and spends his money on senseless things. After breaking numerous taboos, defying customs, and tricking his only ally, Azamat, Borat finds himself utterly alone: he is left with nothing but a bag, a chicken, and a magazine featuring Pamela Anderson on the cover. Borat lights a fire on the pavement and wails into the night. This is a typical "trickster's tricked" pattern. For the first time Borat is seriously frustrated—but not for long. A new day brings "bright" new ideas and plans. A more "decisive" frustration will come later, after Borat's contact with the unattainable woman, Pamela.

20. Ibid., 76.
21. Ibid., 7.
22. David Marchese and Willa Paskin, "What's Real in 'Borat'?" at http://www.salon.com/ent/feature/2006/11/10/guide_to_borat/print.html (last consulted 9 November 2007).
23. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 71.
24. Ibid., 47.
25. Ibid., 28.

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Paul Radin points out that the trickster undergoes a civilizing process during this cycle and, by the end, his behavior becomes more mature, sensible, and useful. The benefits of civilization "can be achieved only through conflict and growth, a conflict and growth that must be both outward and inward."[26] The trickster's story, then, is a tale of gradually "growing up," becoming socialized; it is not a one-night miracle. Naturally, Hyde says, "awakened consciousness is the potential end of narrative; without it, the tale can go on and on."[27] By the end of his journey, Borat's enormous sexual drive has achieved (relatively) normal levels (in myths it happens when the trickster's huge sexual organs are reduced to normal size), and he returns to his "home country" with his new wife.[28]

Among various theories about tricksters, psychoanalytic theory deserves special attention as it is most applicable to our film. Jung considered the trickster a collective personification, an archetype, a stage in the development of human consciousness from savagery to civilization. In myth the trickster is usually an animal capable of assuming human form, but one whose behavior and consciousness are, nevertheless, not human enough. Motivated solely by his instincts, unrestrained, and chaotic, the trickster is certainly at the animalistic level. For most of the film, only the animalistic or subhuman side of Borat is presented. At the same time, according to Jung, the trickster "is no match for the animals either, because of his extraordinary clumsiness and lack of instinct."[29] Like a child, the traditional trickster "is *a*moral, not *im*moral," with "the mentality of an infant. In his comportment he is a grotesque mixture of infant and mature man."[30] Borat is an adult, yet on his journey across America he is like a child who is not yet socialized and does not ponder the consequences of his actions. He has no introspection, no code of ethics, and does not seem to understand what is permitted or forbidden. Like a child who eagerly learns about the world around him, he asks the most unexpected and "inappropriate" questions and thus makes all the "adults" look silly and the movie audience laugh. Again, it is probably no coincidence that the region of the world from which Borat ostensibly comes is also seen as a combination of infantile and mature in the American folk imagination. Countries such as Kazakhstan, although deemed to have mature cultures, are considered economically infantile, yet capable of "developing" into mature capitalism with the help of American aid.

Jung considered the trickster a shadow figure, a "summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals" that are ever present in the personality.[31] This implies that everyone has a trickster unconscious: the veneer of civilization covers a primitive core. The looming presence of this shadow stems from "the increasing repression and neglect of the original

26. Radin, *World of Primitive Man,* 314.

27. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 221.

28. Radin, *World of Primitive Man,* 338.

29. Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster,* trans. R. F. C. Hull (London, 1972), 114.

30. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 10 (emphasis in the original); Radin, *World of Primitive Man,* 313.

31. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," 150.

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mythologems, and a corresponding projection on other social groups and nations."[32] Repression prevents myths from vanishing because "repressed contents are the very ones that have the best chance of survival."[33] According to this theory, the trickster "holds the earlier low intellectual and moral level before the eyes of the more highly developed individual, so that he shall not forget how things looked yesterday."[34] And Borat allows an American audience to feel sophisticated while projecting their shadow aspects onto an Other who is both post-Soviet and Muslim.

Present-day America may be especially in need of a trickster figure. Contemporary society certainly places many restrictions on the behavior of its members, justifying these by everything from political correctness to the demands of national security, while simultaneously promoting a "no rules" mentality. As Hyde states: "If by 'America' we mean the land of rootless wanderers and the free market, the land not of natives but immigrants, the shameless land where anyone can say anything at any time, the land of opportunity and therefore of opportunists, the land where individuals are allowed and even encouraged to act without regard to community, then trickster has not disappeared. 'America' is his apotheosis; he's pandemic."[35] Is Borat, then, the epitome of the American trickster, the artistic response to current social needs?

Some would argue that this is indeed that case. Furthermore, they emphasize the positive and creative aspects of the film and its hero. Indeed, as we have seen, creativity is one of the trickster's attributes. Trickster is a fool and a buffoon—but he is also a cultural hero, a divine creator.[36] As cultural hero, Trickster invents fish traps, brings fire, and even "turns his own destroyed intestines into foodstuffs for the New People."[37] And he provides cultural insight: "when trickster breaks the rules we see the rules more clearly, but we also get a glimpse of everything the rules exclude."[38] Those who assert that *Borat* brings social change through laughter and serves as a "mechanism for expressing all the irritations, dissatisfactions, the maladjustments, in short, the negativism and frustrations" suggest that Baron Cohen himself be seen as a creative trickster or what Hyde calls a "polytropic" man—one who changes his shape and skin, who is "shifty as an octopus, coloring himself to fit his surroundings, putting on a fresh face for each man or woman he meets, charming, disarming, and not to be trusted."[39] There are, however, several reasons why such a characterization is not appropriate. First, the context in which the traditional trickster operates is radically different: "Once one has a sense of the complex uses of Coyote tales one can see that most modern thieves and wanderers lack an important element of trickster's world, his sacred context. If the

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 145.
34. Ibid., 147.
35. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 11.
36. Radin, *Trickster,* 160.
37. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 158.
38. Ibid., 295.
39. Radin, *World of Primitive Man,* 338; Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 53.

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ritual setting is missing, trickster is missing."[40] Telling trickster stories is not a frivolous activity. Barre Toelken, who lived among Navaho in southern Utah for thirteen years, concluded that "the telling of, and listening to, [trickster] stories is a serious business with serious consequences" and that such stories were performed only "within certain cultural contexts for moral and philosophical reasons."[41] Although it is impossible to determine Baron Cohen's motivations with complete certainty, they seem to have more to do with fame and fortune than with morality or philosophy. As noted above, he seems to have been willing to act irresponsibly toward people appearing in the film. Many were not actors playing scripted roles and did not give their consent to appear in the film as fools.

The other element missing from *Borat* is tradition. Tricksters in folk narratives are meaningful because they are deeply rooted in traditional culture and belief. Because tradition provides a deep pool of knowledge shared by the narrator of a trickster tale and the audience, real trickster stories, as they are passed from generation to generation, can adapt to their times and address changing societal issues. A story about Coyote can be, and has been, used to discuss drug abuse in the local Cree community, as documented by one of the students in our folklore class.[42] Borat, though he borrows extensively from his mythical counterparts, lacks rootedness and traditionality. He is not a part of either Kazakh or American folklore. While "every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew . . . for he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual," a trickster not rooted in a particular culture lacks the wealth of associations and the variety of character traits that permit adaptation and the generation of new stories.[43] Borat is not good cycle material. Only so many Kazakh/east European jokes are possible. And the chances of Baron Cohen passing himself off again as a real post-Soviet reporter are small. But Hollywood is especially fond of cycles, usually called sequels in the case of films. So how can Baron Cohen capitalize on his success? Baron Cohen may well be forced to assume new guises and to intrude into the lives of additional unsuspecting people. Internet rumor had it that he would appear as the gay Bruno, one of the characters that Baron Cohen plays on his *Da Ali G Show* on television. As it turns out, the trickster has tricked us and changed course again. Baron Cohen has just published a book entitled *Borat: Touristic Guidings to Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan; Touristic Guidings to Minor Nation of U.S. and A* under the penname Borat Sagdiyev, and, as the Borat character, has been promoting it on television shows such as ABC's *Good Morning America* (on 7 November 2007, for example).[44]

40. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World,* 13.

41. Toelken quoted by Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones, *Folkloristics: An Introduction* (Bloomington, 1995), 299.

42. Megan Elizabeth Spatz, "Roles That Stories Play in Modern Native Society" (paper for "Introduction to Folklore," University of Alberta, 2006).

43. Radin, *Trickster,* 168.

44. Borat Sagdiyev, *Borat: Touristic Guidings to Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan; Touristic Guidings to Minor Nation of U.S. and A* (New York, 2007).

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For theatergoers who are able to distance themselves from Baron Cohen, his trickster personae may well meet the expressive needs that traditional tricksters provide. But when entertainment and trickster-like expression are achieved at the expense of real people rather than mythic characters, the whole process becomes a questionable exercise, possibly amusing to bystanders and onlookers, cinematic or other, but potentially unsafe for the people subjected to the violent disorder generated by the trickster who "feels no anxiety when he deceives."

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